

Patient education: Diverticulitis (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

What is diverticulitis? — Diverticulitis is a disorder that can cause belly pain, fever, and problems with bowel movements.

The food we eat travels from the stomach through a long tube called the intestine. The last part of that tube is the colon ([figure 1](#)). The colon sometimes has small pouches in its walls. These pouches are called "diverticula." Many people who have these pouches have no symptoms. Diverticulitis happens when these pouches develop a small tear also known as a "microperforation," which then become infected and cause symptoms.

What are the symptoms of diverticulitis? — The most common symptom of diverticulitis is pain, which is usually in the lower part of the belly. Other symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Nausea and vomiting

Is there a test for diverticulitis? — Yes. There are a few tests your doctor or nurse can do to find out if you have diverticulitis. But tests are not always needed. Your doctor or nurse might be able to diagnose you without them. If you do have a test, you might have a:

- **CT scan** – A CT scan is a kind of imaging test. Imaging tests create pictures of the inside of your body.
- **Abdominal ultrasound** – This test uses sound waves to create pictures of your intestines.

How is diverticulitis treated? — That depends on how bad your symptoms are. If you have mild symptoms, your doctor or nurse will put you on antibiotics and might put you on a clear liquid diet for a short time. That might be all the treatment you need.

But if you have severe symptoms, or if you get a fever, you might need to stay in the hospital. There, you can get fluids and antibiotics through a thin tube that goes into your vein, called an "IV." That way you can stop eating and drinking until you get better.

If you have a serious infection, the doctor might put a tube into your belly to drain the infection. In very bad cases, people need surgery to remove the part of the colon that is affected.

A few months after your infection has been treated, your doctor might recommend that you have a procedure called a colonoscopy ([figure 2](#)). During a colonoscopy, the doctor can look directly inside

your colon to get an idea of the number of diverticula in your colon and to find out where they are. At the same time, he or she can check signs of cancer.

Should I change my diet if I have had diverticulitis? — If you have had diverticulitis, it's a good idea to eat a lot of fiber. Good sources of fiber include fruits, oats, beans, peas, and green leafy vegetables. If you do not already eat fiber-rich foods, wait until after your symptoms get better to start.

You do **not** need to avoid seeds, nuts, popcorn, or other similar foods.

More on this topic

[Patient education: Stomach ache and stomach upset \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Diarrhea in adolescents and adults \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Constipation in adults \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Diverticular disease \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

All topics are updated as new evidence becomes available and our [peer review process](#) is complete.

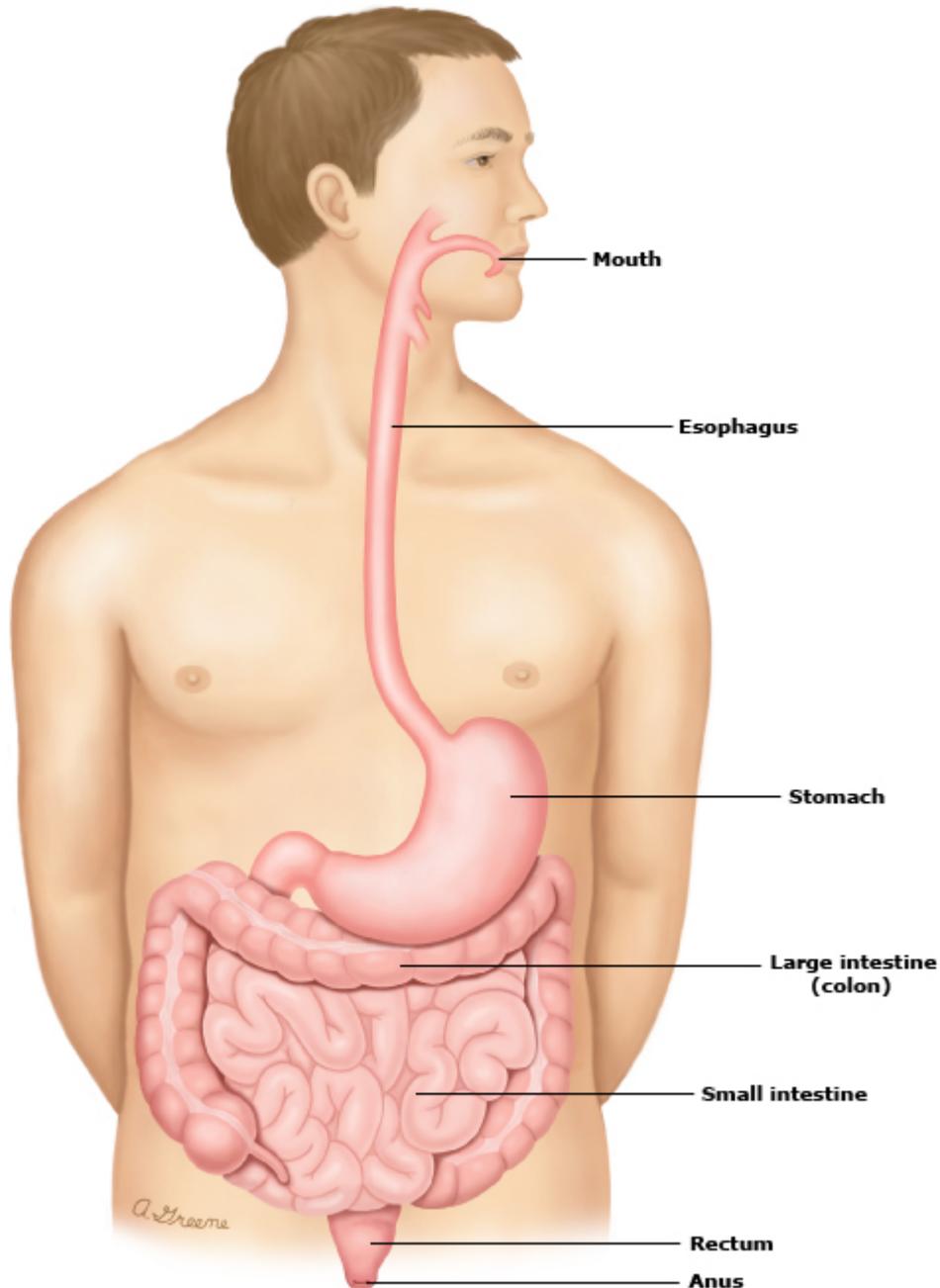
This topic retrieved from UpToDate on: Jan 29, 2017.

The content on the UpToDate website is not intended nor recommended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your own physician or other qualified health care professional regarding any medical questions or conditions. The use of UpToDate content is governed by the [UpToDate Terms of Use](#). ©2017 UpToDate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Topic 15393 Version 6.0

GRAPHICS

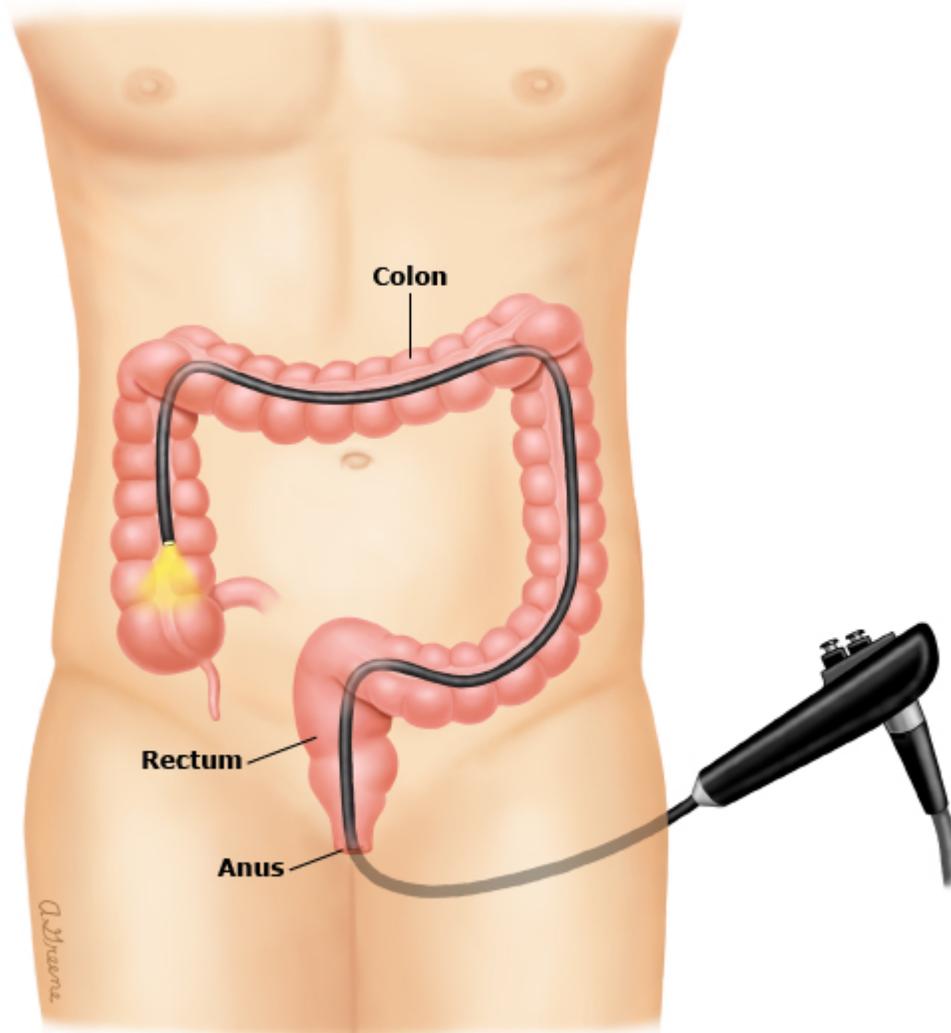
Digestive system



This drawing shows the organs in the body that process food. Together these organs are called "the digestive system," or "digestive tract." As food travels through this system, the body absorbs nutrients and water.

Graphic 66110 Version 4.0

Colonoscopy



During a colonoscopy, you lie on your side and the doctor or nurse puts a thin tube with a camera into your anus (from behind). Then the doctor or nurse advances the tube into the rectum and colon. The camera sends video pictures from inside your colon to a television screen.

Graphic 52258 Version 4.0